

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
Department of Health Services



ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER
Governor

January 18, 2006

Dear California Department of Health Services (CDHS) Partners:

One of the most important public health issues facing California is the threat of pandemic influenza. Pandemic influenza could have devastating worldwide consequences that extend beyond the health and medical systems into every sector of society. California, with its multiple international ports of entry, may be one of the first states affected by a pandemic influenza outbreak. Given this threat, we are preparing today for what may come tomorrow. Our goal is a shared one – to prepare, to respond appropriately, and to save lives.

A pandemic influenza strain does not currently exist. However, a new strain of avian influenza (the H5N1 strain) has been spreading in bird populations in Asia for several years. As of January 14, 2006, there have been 148 confirmed cases and 79 deaths from the H5N1 in six nations (Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Turkey). Genetic changes in the strain that would result in it being readily transmissible from person to person are all that is needed for the emergence of an influenza pandemic.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have identified six stages of pandemic monitoring and response – these range from the Interpandemic Period (phase 1) when no influenza virus has been detected in humans, to the Pandemic Period (phase 6) during which there is sustained transmission of influenza in the general population. WHO and CDC have characterized the present situation as part of the Pandemic Alert Period (phase 3). In phase 3, human infections are present, but human-to-human spread of the disease is rare or not present.

In preparation for an influenza pandemic, CDHS has drafted a revision to its Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response Plan (Plan). The Plan focuses on detection, response, and recovery. The Plan is an annex to CDHS's overall Public Health Emergency Response Plan and Procedures and builds on CDHS's general emergency response structure and the State emergency response plan. It is designed to follow the management and collaborative structure of the State's Standardized Emergency Management System - the system used by all State emergency responders. The plan is also in compliance with the National Incident Management System as required by federal regulations.

This draft Plan describes the State's public health and medical response, and is consistent with the Pandemic Influenza Plan that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Plan released in November 2005. CDHS will continue work on the Plan to develop operational detail for many of the actions, working with other government agencies and private entities to delineate their roles in response.

Emergency preparedness, including preparedness for pandemic influenza, is one of the highest priorities for CDHS and Governor Schwarzenegger. While the Governor recognizes that everyone has a responsibility for preparedness including individuals, communities, and private industry, government must play a key role in actively preparing for the threat of pandemic influenza. As outlined in the Governor's Budget for fiscal year 2006-07, the Governor proposes to enhance the State's preparedness for natural and intentional disasters by including \$45.8 million General Fund to support California's public health system. These additional budget allocations will greatly enhance the capacity of CDHS and local health departments to respond to a pandemic outbreak and other natural and intentional disasters. The Governor's proposals include:

- Expanding capacity to investigate disease outbreaks
- Expanding communicable disease surveillance and response
- Increasing California's antiviral supply and capacity to manage antivirals and vaccines
- Supporting local health departments' public health infrastructure to train for, plan for, and respond to natural and intentional disasters
- Mounting an aggressive public education and information campaign
- Developing an ongoing program for preventing and controlling infections in healthcare facilities.
- Strengthening the State's laboratory infrastructure and surge capacity

Strengthening our State's emergency preparedness and response is a goal we all share. CDHS looks forward to working with the Legislature to advance initiatives essential to our efforts to prevent and protect Californians from an influenza pandemic or other disaster.

CDHS is seeking comment on the Plan. We recently expanded the role of the state's bioterrorism Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) to include review and comment on the draft Plan. The JAC's first review of the Plan will take place at their meeting on January 25, 2006 in Sacramento. We are working with our colleagues in the California Conference of Local Health Officers, the County Health Executives Association of California, the California Medical Association, the California Hospital Association, the California Primary Care Association, our federal partners at the CDC and the Health Resources and Services Administration, and our partners throughout State government including the Emergency Medical Services Authority, the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the Office of Emergency Services.

We welcome your comments on the Plan. The Plan is located on the CDHS website at <http://www.dhs.ca.gov>. Any interested party can submit comments to panflu@dhs.ca.gov through **February 24, 2006**. We will review all comments and revise the draft Plan. While CDHS will be unable to respond individually to comments, we will compile and post a summary of the types and volume of comments received. CDHS will release the revised, final Plan in Spring 2006.

California has the essential building blocks in place to protect the public from an influenza pandemic. However, we must continue to strengthen our preparedness. Pandemic influenza may be the biggest public health challenge of our time. Your comments, and those of other community stakeholders, will provide CDHS with valuable information that will allow us to build on this important planning document. We look forward to hearing from you.

If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Jennifer Kent, Deputy Director, Legislative and Governmental Affairs at (916) 440-7500.

Respectfully,



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Director



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